

CHICKASAW
Heritage Series



**BEARER OF
THE MORNING**

TE ATA — THE ENDURING LEGACY OF A
TRADITIONAL NATIVE STORYTELLER

S E C O N D A R Y

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What role does storytelling play in the preservation of a culture?
- Why is preserving the cultural traits of indigenous peoples important?
- What is unique about using the performing arts (dance and oration) as a mechanism for expressing Native American culture?
- Why have governments felt it necessary to assimilate native cultures in preservation of the dominant culture?



LEARNING GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

- To describe why Te Ata is an important figure in Chickasaw, Oklahoma and American history
- To explain the role of storytelling and its importance in literature, history and the preservation of culture
- To demonstrate the necessity of respect for diversity within ethnic groups comprising American society
- To recognize the significance of the cultural barriers faced by the Chickasaw Nation
- To examine attempts made by the federal government to interfere with tribal sovereignty

BACKGROUND:

TE ATA

Te Ata, also known as Mary Frances Thompson Fisher, was a Chickasaw storyteller and performer who shared the history and culture of the Chickasaw people to audiences around the world. Born and raised in the Tishomingo area, Te Ata was influenced by teachers and mentors who encouraged her to perfect her talents in drama, dance and music. As part of the Chautauqua circuit, she had the opportunity to perform for American presidents and European royalty, thus providing the world with insight into the culture and history of the Chickasaw people. Te Ata died in 1995 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, at the age of 99.

THE INDIAN REMOVAL ACT OF 1830

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson pursued a policy of Indian removal, forcing American Indians living in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi to give up their homelands and move hundreds of miles to territory in present-day Oklahoma. The forced migration of the Indians to the new territory became known as the Trail of Tears. The policy of Indian removal was devastating to Native Americans, their culture and their way of life. Chickasaw families were met with hardship and death along the Removal, traveling hundreds of miles in extreme cold and heat.

THE CODE OF INDIAN OFFENSES, 1883

In 1883, the United States government adopted laws to keep Native American citizens from cultural practices such as dances, songs, language and other cultural traditions. The government wanted Native Americans to assume the ways of the white man and give up their traditional ways. If they did not, Native Americans ran the risk of being arrested. The practice of giving up one's own culture and taking on the culture of a more dominant culture is called assimilation.

CHAUTAUQUA

In the early 1900s, there was no television, no social media and no internet access. People looked for other ways to find entertainment. One movement that swept across America during this time was the Chautauqua Circuit. Chautauqua programs began in the state of New York and quickly spread throughout the United States. A Chautauqua was similar to a talent show that might be held today. However, often the shows included speeches, religious programs and educational entries. To hold a Chautauqua, tents were set up outside of town, and the performers spent several days in one location holding shows for townspeople who would come to listen to music and poetry, learn about other cultures and hear famous orators of the day. Te Ata became a very popular part of the Chautauqua movement because people wanted to hear stories about Chickasaw and other Native American culture.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES:

1. DVD, *Te Ata*, the documentary
2. *Te Ata*, the documentary Viewing Guide and Answer Key
3. *Te Ata*, Discussion Questions for after viewing
4. Device for filming storytelling presentations
5. Placards-- classroom set of primary source documents, advertisements for a Chautauqua, photographs, a map of Indian Territory including the Chickasaw Nation, letters or telegrams
6. Highlighters

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY:

native storyteller

mentor

culture

Chickasaw Nation

primary source

Chautauqua Circuit

legacy

Oklahoma Historical Society

documentary

stereotype

cultural trait

prejudice

indigenous

oral tradition

Americanization

citizenship

LESSON PLAN

ENGAGE:

The teacher should post essential questions and introduce the topic and learning objectives of the lesson. To engage students, the teacher should distribute photographs of Te Ata and provide the opportunity for students to discuss what they feel the photographs portray.

The teacher should then present biographical information about Te Ata and share background information about the documentary and when and why the documentary was made. Academic vocabulary should be introduced.

https://ged.com/wp-content/uploads/academic_vocab_activities_0.pdf

Student Activity 1: “What’s Your Story?” Oral Histories

The teacher should ask each student to think about an oral history that is important to his/her family. Encourage the student to bring an artifact that accompanies the selected oral history. Working with a partner, the student should conduct a 3-5 minute interview and then switch partners. The interview questions might include: “What is it about this story and this artifact that made you choose to share it?”

After both students have shared their stories, have them discuss why oral histories might be important to families and societies. What role do oral histories play in preservation or culture?

EXPLORE:

By viewing the documentary, *Bearer of the Morning*, students will deepen their understanding of events in Te Ata’s life and her importance in preserving Chickasaw culture.

Student Activity 2: “Bearer of the Morning,” documentary

Students should use the provided Viewing Guide while watching the documentary, Bearer of the Morning. At the conclusion of the viewing, students should be given the opportunity to react to the film either orally or in writing.

Student Activity 3: “What’s In a Name?”

Each student should interview parents/guardians about the origins of his/her name using the following questions.

- What does the name mean?
- Why was it chosen?
- Is there significance regarding this name within the student’s family?

In class, have groups of two to three students discuss the same question with their peers. In addition, the students might also discuss the following question: “If the student could change his/her name to one of greater significance, what would he/she choose and why?” Students should then design a banner illustrating their name, its meaning and significance.

EXPLAIN:

The teacher should discuss the importance of maps and primary source documents to the study of history. The discussion could include information about the Oklahoma Historical Society and other sources that may be accessed for primary source documents.

Student Activity 4: “Document This!!”

The teacher should then distribute samples of primary source documents such as thank you notes and letters written to Te Ata after her performances, a video of Te Ata’s lectures, a video of Te Ata performing, the Code of Indian Offenses, the telegram from Eleanor Roosevelt to Te Ata, a map of Indian Territory/ Chickasaw Nation and the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

During this activity, time should be provided for students to discuss how the primary source documents helped them develop insight into the life of Te Ata and why Te Ata’s legacy is important.

TEACHING STRATEGIES:

Gallery Walk, <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/gallery-walk>

Jigsaw strategy, <http://www.teachhub.com/jigsaw-method-teaching-strategy>

Think-Pair-Share, <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-think-pair-share-30626.html>

How to Analyze a Written Document, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html>

Compare/Contrast Model, <https://lead4ward.com/playlists/>

RESOURCES:

<https://library.usao.edu/home/content/te-ata-bearer-morning-1>

<https://libraries.ou.edu/locations/docs/westhist/fisher.htm>

THE CODE OF INDIAN OFFENSES, 1883

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Code_of_Indian_Offenses

INDIAN CITIZENSHIP ACT OF 1924

<https://www.archives.gov/files/historical-docs/doc-content/images/indian-citizenship-act-1924.pdf>

EXTEND:

Teddy Roosevelt once described the Chautauqua as “the most American thing about America.” In this activity, students will recreate the Chautauqua experience within a 21st century mindset. The Chautauqua was an early 20th century version of the TED Talk.

Activity 5: “Hosting a 21st Century Chautauqua”

Procedures for Hosting a 21st Century Chautauqua:

1. The teacher should present background information on the Chautauqua Circuit and the history of native storytelling (see web address below).
 - a. Key aspects of the Chautauqua included: superstar entertainers, dramatic arts, vaudeville acts and lectures by scientists, theologians and politicians.
 - b. Historically, Chautauquas were held outdoors in idyllic settings. If possible, and if weather conditions allow, the Chautauqua should be held outdoors to recreate this important aspect of the movement.
2. The teacher should assign two to four students per group. Each group should be asked to create and perform an act for the classroom Chautauqua. The act should be approximately 5-10 minutes in length.

- a. Potential topics for the Chautauqua could include: social problems or issues within the student's school or community or information about the Chickasaw Nation and/or the state of Oklahoma. Others may choose to create a musical or dramatic performance piece. The teacher may either select topics for the groups or allow students to choose a topic.
 - b. The teacher should allow two days for student research, writing and gathering props for vignettes.
3. The teacher should then have students perform their vignettes for the Chautauqua. The teacher may wish to invite school and/or district leadership, other local dignitaries and members of the community.
 4. To evaluate the students' performances, the teacher should create a rubric based on the designated course and Oklahoma Social Studies Practices on which students are being assessed. Sample rubrics may be accessed using the internet search term "rubrics for classroom performances" or "rubrics for classroom presentations."

<http://www.chautauqua.org/what-is-a-chautauqua.html>

EVALUATE:

The teacher may choose to use the 21st Century Chautauqua as the summative assessment. Formative assessments such as "Think-Pair-Share," "Three-Way Summaries" or "Strategic Questioning" may be used throughout the unit. A more traditional summative assessment might also be developed to close the lesson and demonstrate student understanding.

ALIGNMENT TO OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

CONTENT STANDARDS

OKH.3.5 Explain how American Indian nations lost control over tribal identity and citizenship through congressional action, including the Indian Reorganization Act.

OKH.5.1 Examine the policies of the United States and their effects on American Indian identity, culture, economy, tribal government and sovereignty including: A. passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 B. effects of the federal policy of assimilation including Indian boarding schools (1880s-1940s) C. authority to select tribal leaders as opposed to appointment by the federal government D. exploitation of American Indian resources, lands, trust accounts, head rights and guardianship as required by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

OKH.5.8 Describe the contributions of Oklahomans including African-American jazz musicians, the political and social commentaries of Will Rogers and Woody Guthrie, Wiley Post's aviation milestones and the artwork of the Kiowa Six.

OKH.6.3 Describe the artistic contributions of Oklahomans in the fields of music, art, literature, theater and dance such as Ralph Ellison and the Five American Indian Ballerinas.

WG.3.3 Explain the processes of cultural diffusion, acculturation, assimilation and globalization regarding their impact on defining a region.

WG.3.4 Compare the world's major cultural landscapes to analyze cultural differences, cultural identity, social mores and sets of beliefs which determine a sense of place.

WG.3.5 Explain how cultural characteristics, such as language, ethnicity and religion impact different regions.

USH.1.3 Analyze the impact of westward expansion and immigration on migration, settlement patterns in American society, economic growth and American Indians.

C. Examine the rationale behind federal policies toward American Indians including the establishment of reservations, attempts at assimilation, the end of the Indian Wars at Wounded Knee and the impact of the Dawes Act on tribal sovereignty and land ownership.

SOCIAL STUDIES PRACTICES

2.A.9-12.1 Develop, investigate and evaluate plausible answers to essential questions that reflect enduring understandings across time and all disciplines.

2.B.9-12.1 Use interdisciplinary lenses to gather and evaluate information regarding complex local, regional and global problems; assess individual and collective actions taken to address such problems.

3.A.9-12.1 Gather, organize and analyze various kinds of primary and secondary source evidence on related topics, evaluating the credibility of sources.

3.A.9-12.3 Develop questions about multiple historical and/or contemporary sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

3.A.9-12.6 Assess the significance and impact of individuals and groups throughout local, national, tribal and world history, tracing the continuity of past events to the present.

4.A.9-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, evaluating features such as author, date and origin of information.

5.A.9-12.1 Compose narrative writing, when appropriate to a given purpose or task, citing evidence from informational texts.

5.B.9-12.3 Construct visual and/or multimedia presentations, using a variety of media forms to enhance understanding of findings and reasoning, for diverse audiences.

VIEWING GUIDE

1. At the beginning of the documentary, the narrator claims that Te Ata was “not only a talented storyteller, but she also challenged norms as a woman and as a Native American.” How do you think she challenged norms as a woman? a Native American?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: Te Ata challenged norms as a woman because she did things on her own like going to college and moving to New York City. She shared the culture and stories of native peoples with worldwide audiences during a challenging time for Native Americans. She brought history to her audiences by wearing tribal clothing, performing tribal dances and playing tribal music.

2. Why do you think Dr. Davis encouraged Te Ata to incorporate storytelling into her performances?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: Dr. Davis recognized that Te Ata had a natural talent for storytelling and sharing her heritage with others.

3. On November 16, 1907, Oklahoma became a state. How do you think this event impacted Te Ata’s life?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: Responses to this will be based around teacher discussion. Students will possibly connect Oklahoma statehood with the struggle to retain cultural identity or even cultural assimilation.

4. Discuss some of the feelings Te Ata may have felt about her picture on the cover of McCall’s Magazine.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: She may have been embarrassed about the war bonnet and face paint she wore because it was not reflective of her Chickasaw culture. She may have also been worried about offending the elders in her tribe or other people she cared about because it represented a stereotypical Native American person.

5. President Franklin D. Roosevelt worked to make many changes for Native American people during his administration. Discuss some of the federal policy changes occurring during Te Ata’s lifetime?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: Possible responses will include the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, John Collier, Roosevelt’s Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. As an extension activity, the teacher may wish to allow the students time to research these topics independently.

6. What was your favorite part of the documentary? What was the most memorable part of Te Ata’s life to you?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: Answers will vary.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to preserve the cultural traditions and histories of indigenous peoples?
2. Why is storytelling an important aspect of preserving historical knowledge?
3. How does Te Ata use storytelling to preserve the Chickasaw culture?
4. Why do governments feel it necessary to suppress indigenous cultures?
5. How can exposure to learning about other cultures combat stereotypes and prejudices?



V I E W I N G G U I D E

- 1. At the beginning of the documentary, the narrator claims that Te Ata was “not only a talented storyteller, but she also challenged norms as a woman and as a Native American.” How do you think she challenged norms as a woman? a Native American?**
- 2. Why do you think Dr. Davis encouraged Te Ata to incorporate storytelling into her performances?**
- 3. On November 16, 1907, Oklahoma became a state. How do you think this event impacted Te Ata’s life?**
- 4. Discuss some of the feelings Te Ata may have felt about her picture on the cover of McCall’s Magazine.**
- 5. President Franklin D. Roosevelt worked to make many changes for Native American people during his administration. Discuss some of the federal policy changes occurring during Te Ata’s lifetime?**
- 6. What was your favorite part of the documentary? What was the most memorable part of Te Ata’s life to you?**

A C T I V I T Y 4
DOCUMENT THIS

For this activity, use samples of primary source documents (located in the resource tub).